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## JESUS IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT GOSPEL CRITICISM

Phases in the life and thought of Jesus, in the light of modern gospel criticism, are treated by several books here brought together for examination.

Jülicher, in October, 1906, reviewed briefly the work of five previous years upon the criticism of gospel tradition.<sup>1</sup> His views are especially interesting, both because of his competency to pass judgment and because of the importance of the field. He begins by sharply challenging Schweitzer's assertion that modern criticism has produced only negative results and that historical study fails utterly the purposes of religion so far as present needs are concerned. He will concede that the Jesus whom Schweitzer finds in the gospels—a volcanic apocalyptic visionary—is inadequate for present religion, but such a Jesus is Schweitzer's own creation on the basis of an arbitrary and inadequate criticism. He ridicules the idea that the appearance of a book by Schweitzer and by Wrede on the same day in 1901 marks an "epoch," since which historical criticism has made no progress and consequently has been compelled to give itself to popularizing. He believes thoroughly in the validity of the historical method, not as a means of awakening new spiritual life but as necessary to clarify faith and make it more intelligent. Therefore Jülicher notes the new elements in recent criticism of gospel tradition, pointing out what seems to have permanent value and indicating the lines along which future work will be pursued. Wrede's *Messiasgeheimnis*, Wellhausen's recent writings on the first three gospels, and Harnack's *Lucas der Arzt* claim his chief attention.

According to Wrede, Mark's gospel is the outgrowth of primitive theologizing. Jesus had made no messianic claims, but the messianic faith of the community read itself back into his earthly career. He must have been then what they so firmly believe him to be now, the Messiah—or at least he must have expected to become such. But this fact had not been generally recognized by his followers, hence the theory of the hiding of the Messiah, as in Mark. Jülicher rejects this conclusion but commends Wrede's critical spirit. It should teach future investigators the necessity of recognizing that even the earliest tradition cannot be assumed to be entirely free from the bias of the first interpreters. The weakest point in Wellhausen's work is thought to be his depreciation of the value of the logia material as compared with Mark; his picture of the earthly Jesus is also too colorless, and is insufficient to account for the vitality of the first believers'

<sup>1</sup> *Neue Linien in der Kritik der evangelischen Ueberlieferung*. Von Adolf Jülicher (Vorträge des Hessischen und Nassauischen theologischen Ferienkurses. Heft 3.) Giessen: Töpelmann, 1906. 76 pages. M. 1.60.

faith. To say that their exalted religious confidence was merely a creation of their own, based upon the catastrophic close of Jesus' career, makes too strong a demand upon the creative genius of the community. While Jülicher admits that no extant document carries us back to the actual Jesus, he will not grant that the real Jesus differed radically (as Wellhausen seems to think) from the first believers' account of him. Jesus was the creator of the community, and the gospels are greater than the first church. Had Harnack's *Sprüche und Reden Jesu* been in hand it would have given additional significance to Jülicher's review. As it is, he has some misgivings regarding Harnack's conclusions. The identity of authorship for the we-document and the rest of Acts does not appeal to him, nor does he think a companion of Paul would have presented so colorless a life picture of the apostle as that found in Acts. Moreover, to suppose Luke's special material (e. g., the account of the prodigal son, etc.) came from the ecstatic Philip and his hysterical daughters seems to Jülicher somewhat incongruous with the thought content of these narratives. Yet he is in sympathy with Harnack's inclination to trace all tradition back to Palestine, and he especially praises a chance remark in which Harnack suggests that the gospel of Matthew arose in the Hellenistic branch of the Palestinian church to refute the Jews. Hence the ease with which it supplanted Paulinism and took first place in the Greek church.

Jülicher is hopeful for the future of critical investigation in the gospel field. One thing he regards as now established: the synoptic tradition comes almost entirely from Palestine, where it was written down by believing Jews even before the first generation passed away. This conclusion does not prove the authenticity of all tradition; it is still necessary to examine the thought of the primitive community with care in order to eliminate more accurately material distinctive to it.

Schmiedel is so well known through his articles in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* that his published address<sup>2</sup> is especially important as a constructive presentation of the results of his critical work upon the gospels. He selects nine passages which he calls the foundation-pillars of a truly scientific life of Jesus. These statements, from their very nature (e. g., "Why callest thou me good?"), could not have been invented. He finds much else in the gospels that is in line with the "foundations," and so is able to reconstruct a portrait of Jesus which he thinks corresponds with reality. This Jesus is primarily a man of deep religious convictions, but still a man of his

<sup>2</sup> *Die Person Jesu im Streite der Meinungen der Gegenwart*. Vortrag, bei der 17. Hauptversammlung des schweizerischen Vereins für freies Christentum zu Chur am 11. Juni, 1906, gehalten von P. W. Schmiedel. Leipzig: Nachfolger, 1906. 31 pages.

own time. He did not at the beginning of his career think of himself as the Messiah, but when the compelling force of his religious convictions drove him to criticize Israel's most sacred institution, the law of Moses, he inferred that his mission must be messianic. Thereupon he adopted the apocalyptic programme, though his earthly life in the main was not lived in any high state of excitement—he preserved to the end an inward balance of thought and feeling. But he is in no sense to be regarded as divine. Here is Schmiedel's confession of faith (with his own italics): "My inmost religious convictions would suffer no harm were I forced to conclude today that *Jesus never lived at all.*"

Mehlhorn<sup>3</sup> and Robertson<sup>4</sup> take a more comprehensive survey of Jesus' career. Each book is written in popular style, and so reads interestingly. The former writer takes the current critical view of tradition, which recognizes that the gospel story is not all to be taken literally; in fact some entire narratives were originally pious fiction. In general, however, the synoptic representation is true, and Mehlhorn sets forth accordingly the facts which he thinks to be trustworthy—a life picture of Jesus in which the apocalyptic interpretation of his messiahship is made central. Robertson, on the other hand, pays little attention to the results of modern historical criticism, though he professes to write "in the light of modern knowledge." One would never imagine from his treatment that there was such a thing as a scientific examination of early tradition. But the book does not suffer so seriously from this defect as might be supposed. Of course to the historical inquirer it will be valueless, but it will be found helpful for those who wish a devotional study based upon some crucial experiences in the life of the composite Christ of all four gospels.

Kratz<sup>5</sup> is concerned to discover the gospel portrait of Jesus' personality. He has no sympathy with modern gospel critics, who, as he thinks, are merely able to substitute the "findings" of their fancy for the real historical documents, the four gospels. To question the complete reliability of these is to forfeit one's right to the title Christian. Then the pendulum of the author's judgment swings to the other extreme. The Jesus whom he discovers, omitting no part of the gospel record, is only a man, a good man,

<sup>3</sup> *Wahrheit und Dichtung im Leben Jesu.* Von Paul Mehlhorn. (Aus Natur und Geisteswelt: Sammlung wissenschaftlich-gemeinverständlicher Darstellungen.) Leipzig: Teubner, 1906. iv+132 pages. M. 1.25.

<sup>4</sup> *Epochs in the Life of Jesus.* By A. T. Robertson. New York: Scribners, 1907. xii+190 pages. \$1 net.

<sup>5</sup> *Die Persönlichkeit Jesu nach den Evangelien.* Von Heinrich Kratz. Leipzig: Nachfolger, 1906. 63 pages.

deeply spiritual, most highly favored of all men in God's sight; yet he is deluded as to his future hopes, the wish being father to the thought. How strange that God, who arbitrarily delegated to this man miraculous powers in order that men might believe in his unique teaching, should have allowed him to teach so obvious an error about the future world-programme! The author's efforts at toning down the Christology of the Fourth Gospel are more amusing than interesting.

Fendt<sup>6</sup> and Bischoff<sup>7</sup> deal with special historical problems, Meyer<sup>8</sup> and Schnedermann<sup>9</sup> with items that have a theological bearing. Fendt gathers all evidence touching the question of the length of Jesus' public ministry, and after carefully weighing the data concludes that it cannot be supposed to have covered much more than one year. Perhaps it began some time before a Passover season and closed at the time of the next Passover. The work is a valuable reference booklet. Bischoff aims to prove that Jesus' thought, as compared with that of the rabbis, is original in all essential points; and it is assumed that Matthew preserves Jesus' teaching in its most original form. After laying down cautious rules for criticism, the material of Matthew, chaps. 5-7, is treated *seriatim* to prove Jesus' independence; but the "kingdom of Heaven" is treated in a separate section. The "kingdom" for Jesus had a different meaning from that entertained by the Jewish writers before him and by the rabbis after him; and only the much later rabbis connected a meaning similar to his with a wholly different expression, "the future life." The unique work of Jesus was the spiritualization of the "kingdom" idea. While Bischoff is probably on the right track, his treatment is inadequate because of its brevity: the peculiar content of Jesus' thought seems sometimes assumed rather than proved, and too little notice is taken of the possible influence upon Jesus of contemporary eschatological Jewish ideas. Meyer discusses the conception of "life" according to the gospel of Jesus from the standpoint of historical

<sup>6</sup> *Die Dauer der öffentlichen Wirksamkeit Jesu.* Von Leonhard Fendt. (Veröffentlichungen aus dem Kirchenhistorischen Seminar München. II. Reihe Nr. 9.) München: Lentner, 1906. viii + 148 pages. M. 3.50.

<sup>7</sup> *Jesus und die Rabbinen: Jesu Bergpredigt und "Himmelreich" in ihrer Unabhängigkeit vom Rabbinismus dargestellt* von Erich Bischoff. (Schriften des Institutum Judaicum in Berlin Nr. 33.) Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1905. 114 pages. M. 2.20.

<sup>8</sup> *Das "Leben nach dem Evangelium Jesu."* Von Arnold Meyer. (Sammlung gemeinverständlicher Vorträge und Schriften aus dem Gebiet der Theologie und Religionsgeschichte 44.) Tübingen: Mohr, 1905. 44 pages. M. 0.75.

<sup>9</sup> *Das Wort vom Kreuze religionsgeschichtlich und dogmatisch beleuchtet.* Ein Beitrag zur Verständigung über die Grundlagen des christlichen Glaubens. Von Georg Schnedermann. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1906. 74 pages.

interpretation, and then comments upon its permanent validity for religion. The "kingdom" is the theme of Jesus' preaching; it is to be set up on earth, even in Jerusalem, and it comes through God's power; but it is to be realized primarily in men's hearts. It means salvation to men because they have thereby come into fellowship with the Father, and this is the essence of life according to Jesus' gospel. This truth has permanent significance because it indicates what was and ever will be the true way of salvation—inward God-likeness expressing itself in loving service to men, and humble trust in God. But Schnedermann would attach prime significance to the "cross." He regards the "word of the cross" (I Cor. 1:18) to have been the essence of Paul's gospel. Its central meaning for him was the abrogation of the law; but to Jews it was an offense because it did away with the necessity of circumcision, and to Greeks foolishness because of their anti-Semitism. But this fundamental fact of Paul's faith has a remarkable present religious worth; it is the proper "viewpoint for the exposition of Christian teaching in the past and present." The consequent inferences for doctrinal theology are summarized in fourteen closing paragraphs.

Völter<sup>10</sup> and Schlatter<sup>11</sup> write about Jesus' messiahship. Völter's conclusion stands in direct opposition to that of H. J. Holtzmann, whose treatment of the same theme appeared nine months earlier. Holtzmann had said that Jesus either did not claim messiahship at all, or else claimed it in the apocalyptic sense as "Son of man." Völter will accept neither horn of this dilemma. So far as the linguistic evidence goes, he agrees that the phrase in Jesus' day could have meant *mankind*, *a man*, or the apocalyptic *Messiah*. The evidence of the New Testament alone will determine the significance of Jesus' usage; and first place should be given to the testimony of the earliest literature, namely, the primitive portions of the Johannine apocalypse and the original sections (Völter is an expert with the scalpel) of Paul's epistles. Here Jesus is not the "Son of man" but the slain lamb, the one who dies for men; that is, the suffering servant of God (Isa., chap. 53). This, the oldest and most original tradition, presumably reflects Jesus' own conception. But how are the "Son of man" passages to be explained? In several instances the original significance was "man" (the ordinary meaning of the Aramaic); and other occurrences where messianic meaning is evident are due to the primitive theologians. Interpreting Jesus' inner consciousness accordingly, it is found that his assumption of messianic

<sup>10</sup> *Das messianische Bewusstsein Jesu*. Von Daniel Völter. Strassburg: Heitz. 47 pages. M. 1.50.

<sup>11</sup> *Der Zweifel an der Messianität Jesu*. Von A. Schlatter. (Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie. XI. Jahrgang, 1907. 4. Heft.) Gütersloh: Bertelsmann. 75 pages. M. 1.50.

office is reached by gradual steps during his ministry. He began activity as an assistant of John in proclaiming the nearness of the kingdom; and the death of the Baptist, whom he recognized as Elias who was to come, awoke in him practically the first hints of his own mission. This conviction, interpreted in the Isaian sense, increased in strength until he finally came to look upon his approaching death, in submission to the divine will, as the final proof that he was God's chosen servant. His exaltation to lordship would come when, with the near approach of the end of the world, the general resurrection would take place. In this representation one is struck with the serious impoverishment of the richness of Jesus' inner life; but the monograph has some value as a protest against the one-sided tendency, at present prevalent in several quarters, to interpret Jesus as essentially an *Apokalyptiker*. But the corrective for this error probably is not a leveling of his life down to that of an Old Testament prophet. The wealth of his spiritual life-content is too great to be compressed within the compass of either the prophetic or the apocalyptic mold.

Schlatter does not examine Jesus' inner consciousness, but makes a plea for the recognition of the kingly dignity of his messianic majesty. Those who think the historical records are not primarily an attestation of Jesus' "kingly will" are likened to the teachers of Capernaum and the theologians of Jerusalem. They fail to recognize that not words but power is the essential thing in kingship—"the king proves himself to be such by his work," which is demonstrated with respect to Jesus by his absoluteness in matters of religion. Of course there are restraints manifest in his career, for example, his breach with Israel growing out of his call to repentance, but the very content of this message is witness to his "kingly thought." He was also dependent upon the word as a means of expressing his will, but this word as spoken by him was no ordinary religious teaching—it came from God and revealed his will, therefore had "absolute worth." Moreover, Jesus shows a certain amount of passivity toward his kingly name, but this is because he wishes to emphasize God's supremacy. It may fairly be said that no part of the argument will adequately meet any particular phase of doubt that is likely to arise regarding Jesus' messiahship.

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There are four problems discussed in the four essays of Spitta's book,<sup>12</sup> *The Geographical Disposition of the Life of Jesus according to the Synoptics*,

<sup>12</sup> *Streifjagen der Geschichte Jesu*. Von Friedrich Spitta. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1907. viii + 230 pages. M. 6.80.

The Great Confession of Peter and the conversation of Jesus with the disciples at that time, The Question of Jesus concerning David's Son and David's Lord, and Christ the Lamb. Of these, the discussion of the first is the most detailed, and the discussion of the last is the most original and the most interesting. Spitta himself is half inclined to apologize to the critical school for the fact that his conclusions are for the most part conservative. He declares however that this is not his fault, for his methods are scientific throughout; and he challenges anyone who is dissatisfied with the results to show where these methods are faulty at any point. Very characteristically he suggests that both conservatives and radicals are in danger of running in ruts, and he claims perfect freedom from prejudice in his own investigations. He looks upon these matters with fresh eyes, as if a whole flood of critical essays had not already been poured over them. He seldom quotes from other authorities, and only when they seem to aid in the presentation of his own view.

In the first essay Spitta divides the life of Jesus into eight periods and studies the synoptic account of each in turn, with a view to determine the geographical setting in each case. He concludes that Mark confines the active ministry of Jesus, after the baptism in the Jordan, to Galilee. In this narrative Jesus never goes to Jerusalem until he goes there to die. Matthew presents a similar picture. Luke differs radically in putting the beginning and the end of the ministry of Jesus in Judea. Between these there is a double stay in Galilee, the two portions of which are divided by a long period of activity again in Judea. Luke is nearer John at this point than he is to Matthew or Mark; and John's account cannot be set aside until Luke's great insertion has been explained more satisfactorily.

In the second essay Spitta discusses the place of the narrative of the day at Caesarea Philippi in the synoptic tradition, the meaning of the speech made by Peter, and its significance in the life of Jesus. In the third essay the claim of Jesus that he was David's Son is studied in connection with the question concerning the greatest commandment and the question of the Sadducees concerning the resurrection, and then in its setting in Luke, and finally in Matthew and Mark; and the conclusion is that Bousset is wrong in saying that Jesus denied the Davidic sonship of the Messiah, for on the contrary Jesus without any hesitation represented himself as David's son.

In the fourth essay we come upon the interesting result that the later church conceptions of Jesus as Lamb and Shepherd have absolutely reversed the original presentation by Jesus himself. His whole conception was a noble one, that of the protector and defender of the flock. In his use of



these figures Jesus did not think of passive suffering and patient endurance of evil, but rather of active leading and fighting in behalf of the weak. Spitta shows that this more heroic attitude is that presented in the Book of Enoch and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and the later interpretations of Old Testament types.

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#### RECENT DISCUSSIONS ON THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF CHRIST

Professor Allen<sup>1</sup> attempts to show that a modern man may be a clergyman in the American Episcopal church, subscribe to its creed, and take the necessary oath of the clergy without stultifying his conscience. But while the book is restricted to a concrete denominational question it retains interest for the general reader because of the historic significance of the Anglican and Episcopal church, the principles involved in the church's rulings, and the various interpretations of the Apostle's Creed, especially of the virgin-birth clause. The author is well aware that to insist upon the Creed in its "catholic" sense is to bar many honest men from the ministry and discomfit others who are already serving in holy orders. But since every clause in the Creed has been interpreted by the church in a different way from time to time it therefore follows that the ordination vow does not bind the minister to any one traditional interpretation.

One feels that Professor Allen has done justice to the Articles of Religion of his church, when he points out that their original purpose was to guarantee the very freedom for which he pleads, viz., an appeal from tradition to the commandments of God as they are found in the Scriptures. He further shows that the church regards "the Scriptures as the word of God containing all things necessary to salvation," and not as an infallible or inerrant oracle.

The section of the book devoted to the virgin birth demonstrates that the primary purpose of the credal phrase "born of the Virgin Mary" was to refute Doceticism. In his desire to show that the church's interest in the virgin birth was relatively late, the author overstates the case as follows: "Turn to the Christian apologists of the age before Constantine for the impressive contrast. Very little had they to say about the virgin birth and nothing about the Mother of God." So far from this being the case, references to the virgin birth are numerous in practically all of the ante-Nicene Fathers and the theological import is considered as very weighty. Upon

<sup>1</sup> *Freedom in the Church; or the Doctrine of Christ.* By Alexander V. G. Allen, D.D. London, New York: Macmillan, 1907. xi + 223 pages.